Pilot composting program launched

By Jonathan Riskind  
Dispatch Staff Reporter

The county's trash authority has seen the future, and it is compost.

Yard-waste composting sites, that is. They are needed to accept the grass, leaves and brush that by the end of 1993 will be banned from landfills and Columbus' trash-burning power plant.

That is the impetus behind a pilot composting project being launched by the Franklin County Regional Solid Waste Management Authority and The Ohio State University.

For the project, the trash authority announced yesterday that it will lease a 24-acre, OSU-owned site south of Ackerman Road. There it will operate a so-called windrow composting operation, tending piles of grass, leaves and brush while they deteriorate naturally into mulch, said Michael Long, executive director of the trash authority.

Yard waste makes up about 20 percent of the more than 1 million tons of garbage collected in the county annually.

The pilot site is expected to process 50,000 cubic yards, or about 15,000 tons, of yard waste a year. Only grass, leaves and brush will be accepted.

The project should begin in the fall. The authority expects to seek bids soon from private contractors to operate the site, which will cost between $100,000 and $200,000 a year, Long said.

The authority expects to spend a total of $1 million on this and other experimental composting projects such as turning sewage sludge into fertilizer and turning leaves and grass into cattle feed, Long said.

All composting projects will be paid for out of tipping fees at the authority-owned county landfill so dumping at those sites will be free. Tipping fees at the landfill are expected to rise April 1 from $4.90 per cubic yard to $7.50, and then to $9.95 on July 1. Part of the increase is needed to finance composting and recycling projects.

Long said he expects the contractor to keep any profits made from selling the compost as mulch, although OSU probably will receive its mulch free in exchange for use of its land.

At the pilot site, OSU researchers will be able to experiment with different ways to run a composting operation and will try to learn the most efficient ways to do things such as limit odors and spur the composting process.

The pilot project will serve as a research tool and a model for several other composting sites the authority expects to place around the county over the next few years, Long said.

Lease terms are still being negotiated for the pilot site, but authority and OSU officials say they envision a one- to three-year lease for a minimal cost, perhaps as low as $1 a year.

In exchange for allowing the use of the property, OSU will be allowed to dump about 9,000 tons of yard waste at the site annually, said John Lawter, OSU's director of roads and grounds.

Neighboring communities such as Upper Arlington and Grandview Heights will be allowed to dump their yard waste at the site after OSU's needs are met, Long said.
Facility to create mulch from waste
Columbus chosen over 11 other sites for model

By Laura Briggs
Lantern staff writer

Ohio State and the Franklin County Regional Solid Waste Management Authority are creating a yard-waste composting facility this fall near State Route 315 and Ackerman Road. The project will be used as a model for other proposed facilities in the state.

Composting is a process where organic materials decompose under natural conditions. The new facility will accept leaves, grass and brush and turn them into mulch, which can be sold to soil in gardens and flower beds, or be combined with other materials to make topsoil.

Ohio State will receive its mulch free as part of a lease agreement with the trash authority for 24 acres of land. An agreement should be reached in less than two weeks, said John Lawter, director of roads and grounds for Ohio State.

The trash authority is required by law to find alternatives for disposal of yard waste. By Dec. 1, 1993, leaves and grass clippings will be banned from the county landfill and the yard waste reduction facility.

"The trash authority chose Ohio State over 11 other sites in the state because of its central location, research capabilities, good drainage and ability to generate yard waste," Lawter said.

"One-third of Ohio State's total yard waste comes from yard waste," said Lawter. Yard waste from the golf course, stadium, practice fields and the university's grounds amounts to 12,000 tons annually, he said. Five thousand tons comes from athletics alone, Lawter said.

Ohio State will be allowed to dump about 9,000 tons of yard waste annually at the facility. Currently, the university stockpiles yard waste in areas such as the golf course, Lawter said. The waste is spread out in rough areas, but accumulation can become a problem, he said.

With the new facility, yard waste will be consolidated into one area, not spread around campus, Lawter said.

The processing area is expected to process 15,000 tons of yard waste annually. Communities such as Upper Arlington and Grandview Heights will be able to dump their yard waste at the site after Ohio State's needs are met.

The waste will first be placed into piles 6 feet high and 14 feet wide, and specially designed tractors will turn them once a day. Oxygen will be added to avoid unpleasant odor and to maintain a high-quality mulch.

OSU researchers will monitor factors such as oxygen levels, temperature, carbon to nitrogen ratio and moisture of the material to obtain the highest quality mulch in the shortest amount of time. This information will be used in developing other county composting sites.

Mike Veenhuizen, an assistant professor of agricultural engineering, said there will be an initial odor from the organic material breaking down into ammonia, but because the facility will be outdoors, the odor should be minimal. Although he is not involved with the project, Veenhuizen said OSU researchers will be able to control the odor as the project develops.

Residents of Buckeye Village and those at the OSU child care facility should not have a problem with compost smell, Veenhuizen said.

Dumping at the site will be paid for by tipping fees at the authority-owned county landfill.

The Franklin County trash authority expects the cost of the project to be $100,000 to $200,000 a year.
Buckeye Village residents leery of compost site

By Todd Harrell
Lantern staff writer

The composting site proposed for construction on OSU land in the fall has some people in Buckeye Village concerned.

The site for the 24-acre facility would be located about 100 yards to the south of the Buckeye Village apartment complex complex, but must first be approved by the Ohio EPA by December 24 of this year before the Franklin County Regional Solid Waste Management Authority and Ohio State can proceed with the project.

OSU graduate student and four-year tenant Hyun Moon said he is concerned about the impact the facility might have on the community.

He is also upset because residents were not informed of the project by Ohio State; he and other residents had to find out about it in the newspaper.

"We are worried about the potential effects of the odors it will bring to the area, the traffic problems it could cause due to dumpster trucks driving through and we're concerned about what the look of the environmental landscape will become," Moon said.

If approved, the facility would accept leaves, grass and brush and turn it into mulch which could then be added to soil in gardens and flower beds or combined with other materials to form compost.

Moon is acting as head chairman of a committee that he formed comprised of himself and several other Buckeye Village residents.

He said the committee is also concerned about the potential health risks to more than 300 children playing at the child health care facility.

John Lawter, OSU director of Roads and Grounds, said the residents of Buckeye Village, Moon in particular, have a misconception of what this composting facility is all about.

"When people here the word, compost, they think or imagine garbage smell of a land fill and it is not going to be that. This is not what this is," Lawter said.

Lawter said if odor from the facility became a problem, it would be closed down.

Lawter also said there will be no traffic problems because they will only allow access from the Lane Avenue entrance, with the possibility of a road extension routed through the health center.

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child care center.

In a meeting between the committee and Lawter, Moon said Lawter stressed how important it was for Ohio State to have this facility and sidestepped the concerns of the residents. Lawter disagreed.

"I answered all their questions and everyone seemed to be satisfied," Lawter said. "The only thing that they were worried about was not having a say in the matter as far as if this facility becomes a problem, and it should be shut down."

Lawter said the facility will be run by the county for as long as the initial lease, which could be one to three years, is in effect.

In Franklin County, yard wastes such as grass clippings, brush and tree stumps and leaves account for nearly 20 percent of the total waste stream, according to a press release issued by the trash authority.

James M. Mentel, director of operations for the trash authority, says in the "release that the trash authority is required by state law to find alternative disposal for yard waste. Beginning on December 1, 1994, yard waste will no longer be accepted at the county landfill or Franklin County's solid waste facility.

Because of this mandate, the Franklin County Trash Authority had to find a location for a new model compost facility.

Joe Heimlich, extension associate with the OSU Development Committee, agreed with Lawter that Moon's concerns would not be a problem.

"I will push for better fencing and posting around the facility so that their will be no problem with the landscape," Heimlich said. "As far as problems with odors coming from the facility, if it is a well run facility their will be no problems, this facility will have several features designed to ensure no odor problems exist."

Heimlich also said there is no danger of chemical runoff from the facility because the whole process of yard waste management does not involve the use of chemicals.

Heimlich said he thinks the residents should become more knowledgeable about the situations and address their concerns in a more clear and concise manner to the county's trash authority.

"With a lack of information, the human mind assumes the worst, and I think that is what is at play here," Lawter said.

Lawter said once the University signs a contract with the county, which they are in the stages of doing now, a public meeting will be held so concerned citizens can ask questions and state their concerns.
OSU students raising a stink about plans for composting site

By Tim Doulin
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Some residents of Buckeye Village at The Ohio State University think putting a yard-waste composting site in their neighborhood stinks or will stink if it is built.

A petition already signed by more than 400 residents is circulating in the village and opposes OSU's plans announced this year to lease 24 acres south of Ackerman Road to the Franklin County Regional Solid Waste Management Authority.

The trash authority would operate a window composting operation that would take in up to 15,000 tons of grass, leaves and brush each year.

The proposed site is about 100 yards from Buckeye Village, which houses about 1,000 OSU students and their families and is run by OSU's Office of Residence and Dining Halls.

"The leaves and trees may not be a problem, but the smell from grass is quite bad," said Jeong-hee Kim, a resident and doctoral student at OSU.

The village sometimes floods during heavy rains, and some residents are concerned the material will wash into the streets and apartments, Kim said.

"I don't know what is going to happen; maybe we are going to be swimming in mulch," Kim said.

Some residents fear that the compost will attract insects, posing a health threat. Residents also believe the site will create traffic problems, with trucks driving into the village to dump their loads.

"I have three children, and I don't want them playing around that," said Michelle Cobbs, a village resident and undergraduate student.

The residential area and the composting site are compatible, university officials believe, saying the site was approved by the solid waste management authority.

"They run these things up in Cleveland, and they run well," said Jim Stevens, assistant vice president for the office of physical facilities at OSU. "There are disasters out there, but that is because they are not run well."

Piles of grass, leaves and brush are supposed to deteriorate naturally into mulch, and an underground drainage system is supposed to take care of any smelly residue.

"It is not like having a big pile of roting grass by your house," Stevens said.

OSU considered establishing a composting site on university property near Don Scott Field on W. Case Road. But the Environmental Protection Agency vetoed the idea, saying the birds attracted to the area could interfere with airplanes taking off and landing, Stevens said.

"I don't know where else to put it," he said. "It is a pasture now, and you have cows and all their activity, and that doesn't seem to hurt the residents."

OSU and the county still are negotiating a contract. The county wants a long-term lease, and OSU wants a one-year contract with an option to renew, Stevens said.

The university will get rid of the composting project if it creates a problem, Stevens said. But residents are skeptical.

"After it is built, we don't think it will be stopped. No way," said Mahn-hee Kang, a Buckeye Village resident and doctoral student.

Kang said he believes that the university is taking advantage of the student residents, who are mostly foreign and transients.

"I think they thought we would not say anything about this," he said. "I look at this kind of as discrimination. If they want a central location, why don't they locate it in Upper Arlington?"
2 compost sites are planned

Franklin County's trash board mulls five-year contracts

By Jonathan Riskind
Dispatch Staff Reporter

The Franklin County trash board expects to start two composting projects this fall at a cost of $10 million over five years, officials said yesterday.

The board delayed a yard-waste composting project at The Ohio State University.

Trash board members will be asked to approve resolutions next month to enter into five-year contracts, each for about $1 million a year, with the two companies submitting the best bids to operate two sites, said Michael Long, director of the Regional Solid Waste Management Authority.

Each site is expected to handle 50,000 tons of yard waste a year by the fifth year. About 180,000 tons of yard waste are collected in the county each year, Long said. The projects will start out handling a total of about 7,000 tons a year.

It is essential to begin opening county yard-waste composting sites because state law bars such waste from landfills by the end of 1993.

Site locations were not disclosed, but only one is in Franklin County, Long said.

Both are in mainly industrial-commercial areas with little residential development nearby, officials said. No zoning changes or variances will be needed, they said.

The current landfill dumping fee, $7.50 per cubic yard, will provide the $2 million a year needed for the composting projects, Long said.

The cost of the OSU project is to be incorporated in 1992 dumping fees, Long said. Those fees could be more than $12 per cubic yard if the trash board takes over the city's trash-burning power plant.

Higher dumping fees will mean higher collection costs.

The trash board will operate the composting sites through the private companies and will probably operate transfer stations, where yard waste can be dropped off. The trash board will not handle curbside collections, officials said.

Many municipalities and private trash haulers may not be equipped now to collect yard waste and regular trash separately, but financial incentives will be offered for them to develop systems, Long said.

Dumping fees at the composting sites will be about $20 a ton. Dumping at the landfill is about $23 a ton, he said.

Long said the delay in beginning an OSU project was caused by a disagreement over a lease. The trash board plans to lease 24 acres south of Ackerman Road from OSU and wants to operate the site for 10 to 15 years, and OSU wants only a three-year project, Long said.

Residents of Buckeye Village, a student housing complex, are opposing the project, saying they fear it would cause odor.

In Illinois, a year after a yard-waste ban went into effect there, composting sites created odor problems for nearby residents, Illinois officials said.

Long said he believes the county trash board can operate such a site so it does not cause odors.

"We're not going to be a nuisance," he said.